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TO NURSES PREPARING FOR ACTIVE SERVICE

BY ALICE FITZGERALD, R.N.

Edith Cavell Memorial Nurse from Massachusetts

After nineteen months of work in military hospitals, with excellent opportunities for seeing and studying people and conditions of the nursing world, I should say that endurance and tact are the most important qualities for a war nurse to possess. There are naturally many other qualifications which one should have, such as a good training, some additional experience, good health, a bright disposition and an endless supply of patience, but these would be almost useless if the first-named, endurance and tact, were not present.

Anyone intending to volunteer for active service should spend a "thought hour" of self examination and see if she can answer such questions as these: Are you ready to give up many of the personal comforts which, up to the present time, you may have looked upon as mere necessities, but which will become impossible luxuries? Are you prepared to leave home for an indefinite period with only about half as much luggage as you generally take on a month's vacation and to do without many of the things which you have always thought essential to your well-being? Are you prepared to face damp and cold so intense and persistent that some days you will seriously doubt if undressing will be possible? And when this difficulty has been overcome and you have tucked yourself under as many covers as you can stand, you begin to wonder if you will ever be able to get up and dress when the morning comes! Your hot water bag becomes cold in a very short time, your tent walls and bed covers are soon covered with frost, and you are lucky if your discomfort is not made worse by chilblains which are "punishing" you dreadfully for having covered them up and tried to make them warm. The cold is just as bad in the huts and also in many of the billets, but fortunately you do not have to worry about the patients for their tents and huts are heated by coal stoves and are usually most comfortable.

By day, also, the cold may be so intense that your hands are blue and numb, but the work has to be done and sometimes you will have to check tears of real suffering and do your duty.

Your laundry will be a great problem; for weeks at a time you may not be able to have any done and a good supply of rubber collars and cuffs will be very comforting.

Do you fully realize how much work there is to be done and how few there are to do it? And off-duty time is very naturally not considered until all the day's work is done. In busy times, your day's work will go

well into the night, and yet you will start again at the usual time the next morning.

It will be most necessary for you to leave all "food fads" at home and your well-being will depend upon your readiness to eat what is put before you, and not mind if your tea or coffee must often be taken sugarless. Your personal independence must be placed under control before sailing, for you become members of the military body under whose strict rules you will work; this, of course, is most necessary and no right-minded person would object to discipline, but some do, and the fact, for instance, that a camera is forbidden, makes it the most longed-for article imaginable, also the fact that a place is "out of bounds" makes that place the most desirable spot you know.

All these points are very personal, and perhaps trifling, in comparison with the work to be done, but of such small things is life made up!

Many can put up with discomforts for a time, but are you prepared to "stick it out?" That is the question you must answer. Endurance means all this as well as the power to work under the double physical and mental strain that accompanies war nursing. The physical strain is somewhat limited by the number of hours in your working day or night, but the mental strain cannot be measured in hours; it is always with you, for you never get away from the war atmosphere.

The wounds which you will be called upon to handle and dress are such that you have never imagined it possible for a human being to be so fearfully hurt and yet to be alive. If the man is seriously crippled or disfigured, it will be well to try not to think too much of his wife, of his children, of his parents, who are anxiously waiting for news of him "over there." If the wounded man is going to die, shall you be able to keep out of your mind the waiting mother or the wife to whom the postman's knock will mean the bearing of the sad news? And when these thoughts are with you most of your waking hours, and many of your sleeping ones, you begin to wonder how it will be possible to face another day of it.

Fortunately, however, there is another side of the work which makes it possible to face each day. There is the man who is getting better and who is happy at the near prospect of getting home; there is the man whom you did not expect to pull through who, by miracle or care, is going to recover; there is the man whose brave deed is immediately rewarded by the formal presentation of a war medal and the whole ward is glad with him and is cheered by the episode; there is the man whose wife and baby have been allowed to come out and see him, and every man in the ward smiles when the baby smiles and longs to pet it and quiet it when it cries. An eight-months-old baby and about sixty ardent but wounded admirers make up a picture which I shall never forget. What volumes could be

written on the memories awakened by that little mite of humanity! Such are the events of the day which cheer one on to renewed efforts and which act as a tonic to one's endurance.

Tact, which I consider second only to endurance, will help you over many a rough road. It will often require all the tact in your possession to set aside the teachings and habits of years and gracefully take to new methods and ways of doing things. To get on harmoniously with a large body of women who may be as set in their ways as you may be in yours, or as sure that they are right as you may be that you are, will be a severe test of your supply of the harmonizing spirit of tact. We graduates are no longer probationers in spirit and enthusiasm, but we must adopt that spirit and enthusiasm which we laid down, shall I say, in our second year of training or before, perhaps, and replaced by the more staid and plodding spirit of senior rank.

In dealing with the medical profession it will be news to no one if I say that you will need much tact.

The patient must be our first and last consideration, and our opinions, our grievances, our desires must be kept in the background; this may often require more tact than you might think necessary. Seniority cannot be enforced and the junior will be doing senior work and the senior will find herself doing junior work, but this must make no difference, for anything that is worth doing is worth doing well, and you must be prepared to "do your bit" wherever you find it.

As to other qualifications, I need not stop to explain why a good training is necessary, and the broader it has been the more useful you will be in your new work. Additional and varied experience will add to your adaptability and to your facility for working under new and difficult conditions; it will assist you in improvising means and methods.

Good health is essential. You must remember that your hands are going to be quite full enough without having to worry about yourself and no one else will have time to do so. By this I do not mean that you will not have the ablest and kindest care if you need it, but I do mean that you should start with "a good bank account of health." Set all vanity aside, if such prudence can be called by that name, and provide yourself with all the "warm woolies" you can, even though you have never worn them before. I would not like to say how many layers of clothing I had to put on during a winter under canvas.

A bright disposition should accompany the above qualifications and it is a great asset under the depressing conditions of endless processions of stretchers coming in and going out, depositing wounded and taking them farther on. A ready smile and a cheery word will greatly brighten the atmosphere and will soon become a habit and you will feel amply repaid by the responsive smile of the ever bright and cheerful wounded soldier.

Patience!!!! bring it all with you and if you have not much of it, beg, borrow or steal some. The patient who wants to be turned on the left the moment after you have made him comfortable on the right; the patient who wants the back rest put up the moment you have taken it down; the patient who waits until you have made his bed and moved away, to call you back and tell you that his heel has been pressing on the splint all day; the patient who makes it his duty to ask you for something, anything, just because you are passing him with about ten other things in the doing, one and all sick men, men you cannot treat impatiently, but who at times tax all the patience you possess. You do not grudge the time you spend in making them comfortable, but you have to think of the other fifty or more patients who are under your care and you wonder how you are ever going to do it. It is very discouraging at times.

Have I painted the picture in tones too dark? I did not intend to do so, but could not truthfully and conscientiously use the rose tones alone.

If you feel that you can answer the call and see it through to the best of your ability, and in spite of all the hardships, you will find it the most satisfying work you have ever done and you will never regret having undertaken it. But, no one need to come with the idea of seizing this opportunity of seeing the world, for she will be most deeply disappointed. Our life here is restricted to work, and our leisure hours are spent more or less in the same atmosphere, for at every step we are reminded of our work. While in the hospital the effects of war are constantly under our eyes; when out of the hospital the military, the convoys, the supply lorries, the ambulances, etc., keep war as a reality ever before us. If we shut our eyes, the distant guns remind us that blood is being shed and that peace is nothing more than a word, a mere sequence of letters whose meaning seems harder to grasp each day.

These few lines have been written in a spirit of encouragement, for I long to see our nurses standing for quantity as well as for quality on the soil of France.

KOREAN FIRST AID

Delia M. Battles, a missionary nurse in Haiju, Korea, writes:

Patients come to our hospital with compound fractures, abscesses, burns and wounds to which have been applied dirty rags, snakes, puff balls, plaster, leaves, oil paper, tobacco and manure.

In Korea, whooping cough is called the "donkey cough."

When a baby is born in Korea, no dressing is applied to the cord, which probably accounts for a great many umbilical hernias. These people believe that the longer the cord is left, the longer the child will live. I found one twelve inches long.